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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 001521

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [GM](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: FRENCH-GERMAN RELATIONS SOLID, DESPITE GERMAN  
RETICENCE OVER HIGH-PROFILE FRENCH PROPOSALS

REF: A. PARIS POINTS - OCTOBER 29

[1](#)B. PARIS POINTS - NOVEMBER 6

Classified By: Ambassador Charles H. Rivkin, Reasons 1.4(b), (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Since the formation of the new German coalition and final ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the French government has made a series of proposals designed to promote French-German unity and further strengthen bilateral ties. In large part, this is a means to emphasize shared priorities as the EU redefines itself under the Lisbon Treaty. German diplomats in Paris have emphasized, however, that splashy ceremonies aside, their real focus will continue to be quiet improvement upon an already astounding degree of institutional integration. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) The GOF has seized upon the formation of the new German coalition government, the Czech ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, and the upcoming commemorations of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall (November 9) and, in France, Armistice Day (November 11) as the perfect opportunity for a renewed and public push for ever closer French-German relations. Newly re-elected German Chancellor Merkel followed the traditional pattern of making Paris her first trip abroad by accepting an October 28 dinner invitation from President Sarkozy to discuss European Council affairs on the eve of the summit meeting. Reciprocally, Sarkozy traveled to Berlin for the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall. More controversially, the GOF waged a campaign in the French press to ensure that Merkel would come to Paris for a historic joint commemoration of Armistice Day (ref A) - a slightly awkward visit for the Germans as Armistice Day celebrates the defeat of Germany in World War I. The hook, according to media and Embassy sources, was to transform this and future Armistice Day ceremonies into celebrations of French-German unity. Meanwhile, State Secretary for European Affairs Pierre Lellouche is reportedly pushing for additional proposals such as reviving the dormant suggestion to create a joint French-German minister who would be a member of both nations' cabinets (ref B).

[1](#)3. (C) According to German Political Counselor Holger Mahnicke, it was Lellouche who "convinced" President Sarkozy of the need for more high-profile engagement with Germany and who floated some of the ideas via the Elysee to the German embassy in September. (NOTE: Interestingly, it seems Lellouche did not work his proposals through the MFA as German desk officer Marianne Carre told us recently her office heard about the idea to transform Armistice Day into a French-German celebration from press reports. END NOTE.) Lellouche also drove home this same point during a November 4 event at the German embassy, at which he gave a long speech citing the need for France and Germany to work together even more closely in the EU after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in order to ensure it remains relevant and dynamic.

[1](#)4. (C) For German diplomats in Paris, however, Lellouche's publicity-heavy initiatives are less important than the overall institutional relationship between the two countries.

During a November 5 lunch with Ambassador Rivkin, German Ambassador Reinhard Schafer stressed that the emphasis on a few symbolic ceremonies obscures the stable reality of French-German relations at all levels. Schafer said there will be a number of high-level visits coming up as newly appointed German ministers make their traditional visit to Paris to meet with their French counterparts. Additionally, he claimed that new German FM Guido Westerwelle "is used to French-German unity," since Westerwelle is the first truly post-war German foreign minister and himself participated in an exchange program in France as a young man. However, Schafer said there will be little substantive change in French-German relations and that the emphasis will be to build on what already exists. He added that no decisions have been made in Berlin on new initiatives. For example, Schafer said Berlin is not currently interested in the French proposal to create a joint French-German ministerial position (NOTE: Nevertheless, on November 6, Lellouche claimed in a radio interview that the proposal could be given to Sarkozy and Merkel for approval as early as January. END NOTE.) Additionally, although Schafer said he could not exclude the possibility suggested by French press reports of a rewriting of the 1963 Elysee Treaty - a document signed by Chancellor Adenauer and President De Gaulle to cement French-German reconciliation and lay the foundation for close bilateral relations - he said this was also not a current German focus.

15. (SBU) At the same time, Schafer stressed that the absence of grand new schemes in no way means that French-German relations would not continue to be a major priority for both governments. He pointed to the enormous degree to which

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bilateral consultation has been institutionalized from the heads of state to the working level. In addition to regular "Blaesheim" summits (informal meetings of the President and Chancellor) and the monthly meetings of foreign ministers, Schafer said even working level staff appointed to new positions in the foreign ministries had to meet and regularly consult with their counterparts. Additionally, exchange officials operate in a wide range of ministries, including the prime minister's office, finance, justice, transport, and agriculture, among others, and Schafer said he would like to see the program expanded to all ministries. Another key aspect of the French-German relationship is the approximately 2,200 sister city programs, which together with youth exchange programs and NGO contacts help to create social links outside of the official relationship.

16. (C) Schafer cited French-German unity at the G20 summits in London and Pittsburgh as key examples of the substantive results of this institutionalization, with intensive direct communication between the Chancellery and the Elysee to coordinate positions beforehand. Indeed, he said the crisis had brought the two countries closer on economic policy, noting that while Germany had "followed the line" on the stimulus plan, the French no longer talk of "gouvernement economique," which Schafer said was code for political control over the European Central Bank.

17. (C) COMMENT: The headline-grabbing French proposals contrast with the measured approach of German officials in Paris but are typical of the Sarkozy administration, which seeks to leverage French-German agreement on major issues within the EU, and globally. Sarkozy has also been anxious to use the recent commemorations to expiate French guilt over then-President Mitterrand's ambiguous reaction to German reunification. Regardless of what initiatives move forward or are quietly shelved, the uniquely institutionalized French-German relationship will likely continue to be a driving force in Europe. END COMMENT.  
RIVKIN